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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 002022

SIPDIS

SECDEF FOR SECRETARY RUMSFELD
STATE FOR PM, INL, WHA, WHA/CEN, AND WHA/PPC

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SUBJECT: SECRETARY RUMSFELD'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MADURO
AND MOD BREVE IN HONDURAS

Classified By: Ambassador Larry Palmer;
Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary: Secretary Rumsfeld met on 20 August with President Maduro and MOD Breve. SECDEF made the following points: (a) the U.S. appreciated Honduras' steadfast support and friendship as demonstrated by the Article 98 agreement and the deployment of a battalion to Iraq. (b) the U.S. supports Central American regional cooperation in the security field, including maritime interdiction. (c) inviting USSOUTHCOM to be an observer at the Conference of Central American Armed Forces (CFAC) could be helpful. (d) SECDEF agreed with MOD Breve that Nicaragua's SA-7's are a serious problem, but that eliminating them should not be linked to reducing Honduras' Air Force. (e) the USG would carefully consider bilateral issues raised by Honduras, e.g., the purchase of UH-1H helicopters and a solution to the Cerro la Mole radar issue. President Maduro and MOD Breve made the following points: (a) deployment of forces to Iraq is for Honduras a matter of both friendship and principle. (b) Central American regional cooperation is important to Honduras to reduce tensions and to promote regional offensive arms reductions. (c) MOD Breve argued for more generous U.S. financial terms for the UH-1H helicopters and for maintaining/repairing the Cerro la Mole radar. (d) he announced that USSOUTHCOM would be invited into CFAC as an observer by the end of the year. End summary.

12. (C) U.S.-Honduran Solidarity: Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had a meeting and luncheon with Honduran President Ricardo Maduro, accompanied by MOD Federico Breve, in Tegucigalpa on 20 August. SECDEF expressed appreciation for Honduras' early signature and ratification (first in the hemisphere) of an Article 98 Agreement, an important issue of U.S. sovereignty. He also thanked Maduro for the Honduran deployment of a battalion of infantry and military police to Iraq. President Maduro said the latter is a matter of both traditional friendship and principle. The U.S., he said, has always been a friend to Honduras in support of its social progress, reforms, and democracy. SECDEF described the situation in Iraq as difficult but improving.

13. (C) Regional Cooperation: President Maduro stressed the importance to Honduras of Central American regional cooperation. Especially for a small country, regional economic integration and participation in the global community are essential to Honduras' future. Honduras is promoting regional security cooperation especially with El Salvador and Nicaragua, both to reduce tensions and to further opportunities for disarmament. SECDEF supported this, pointing to the likely synergy from, e.g., cooperation in interdicting drugs along the coasts. He cited the Hemispheric Maritime Cooperation Initiative he had announced at the November Ministerial in Chile. SECDEF also noted that USSOUTHCOM participation as an observer in CFAC could be helpful substantively and as a catalyst. MOD Breve replied that USSOUTHCOM would be invited by the end of the year.

14. (C) Domestic Issues. President Maduro emphasized his domestic fight against crime. He had championed campaign finance reform in order to limit drug-related money in politics. "We don't want to end up like Colombia," he said (though he had nothing but praise for President Uribe). He spoke at length about the new law outlawing gangs. There are something like 25-40,000 gang members in Honduras committing murder, extortion, and other crimes.

15. (C) Bilateral Issues. The future of the Cerro la Mole radar was discussed. MOD Breve said it is needed to combat drug trafficking. SECDEF replied that we need to know better whether, given the air picture and information-sharing we have from JIATF-South, this radar is really worth the cost. It was agreed that the question needed to be examined, together, on a comprehensive basis. On a second issue, the six UH-1H helicopters whose cost had soared because of U.S. regulations, it was agreed to continue to discuss it.

16. (U) OSD staff drafted this message; SECDEF has read and cleared.
PALMER